

County Council nixes furniture showrooms from neighborhoods

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A Chevy Chase interior design business might have to relocate within a year following the County Council's decision to prohibit furniture sale displays in residential neighborhoods.

"This zoning text amendment will make it clear that the home occupation category does not include displaying furniture for sale that isn't made in the home," County Council member Howard A. Denis (R-Dist. 1) of Chevy Chase said. "It's as simple as that."

Denis introduced the amendment, which passed Tuesday in a 8-0 vote, in response to complaints from the Chevy Chase West Neighborhood Association that the Department of Permitting Services misinterpreted the home occupation law when it granted a permit to Iman Huschmand, who operates an interior design business out of his Chevy Chase home along with his sister.

"In this case, the neighbors let

me know that they didn't think the home occupation law was being used the way it was intended and after careful analysis on my part over the course of about a year, I agreed," Denis said.

Huschmand, who co-owns Sogol Décor House of Design with his sister, interior designer Sogol Afsharjavan, told the County Council during an Oct. 24 public hearing that he lives in the house and that his living room is designed as an example of his sister's work. He said that he has never sold a piece of furniture from his home and has no intention of doing so. The house is located at the corner of Hunt and Wisconsin avenues along a stretch of residential land between Friendship Heights and downtown Bethesda, which neighbors have dubbed the "Green Mile" for its tree-lined streets and proximity to the Capital Crescent Trail.

The amendment went into effect immediately with the provision that any businesses in violation must cease operation within 12 months.

Council member Nancy M. Flo-

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Nancy M. Floreen, County Council

reen (D-At Large) of Garrett Park also called for a broader look at the zoning ordinance to avoid similar situations in the future when residents challenge a Department of Permitting Services interpretation.

"We're going to need a provision in the zoning ordinance called 'common sense,' because we are tying ourselves into knots over interpretive things," Floreen said. "We're wasting a lot of time getting the community riled up over something that never should have been permitted in the first place."

In supporting the amendment during a Thursday meeting of the council's Planning, Housing and Economic Development Committee, Council member Marilyn Praisner (D-Dist. 4) of Calverton also called for more discussion between the Department of Permitting Services and the committee when residents raise concerns about zoning interpretations in the future.

"I just think it would be helpful for all of us to be alert to those issues rather than having individual council members encouraged to look at the zoning ordinance in a piecemeal process," she said.